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SUBJECT: JAPANESE POLITICIANS, ACADEMICS VOICE CONCERNS  
ABOUT BURMA

Classified By: CDA Joseph R. Donovan for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

#### Summary and Comment

1. (C) Burma experts in the Diet and academia are pressing the Japanese government to take a firmer stance against Burma's government over human rights violations. They are hopeful that intense media scrutiny after the death of a Japanese press photographer will convince Japan to ramp up its pressure on the Burmese authorities to move toward democratization. However, there continue to be those who view pressure on Burma as counterproductive. The Japanese government also is feeling the loss of the access to the Burmese government it had through former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt.

2. (C) Japanese politicians and scholars often claim a special relationship between Japan and Burma, and compared to other Southeast Asian countries the relationship between the two may be viewed as relatively good. Burmese may regard the Japanese in a slightly less positive light, however. The Burmese initially may have thought Japan had come to liberate them from the British, but when Japan failed to recognize an independent Burma, the Japanese-trained Burmese army ended up fighting the Japanese. Over the years, much history has been forgotten or rewritten resulting today in a special but ambiguous relationship. End summary and comment.

#### Diet, NGO's Speaking Out on Burma...

3. (C) Senior Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) politician and head of the Burma Democratization Parliamentary League Tadamori Oshima told Embassy Tokyo that Japan has always hesitated to pressure Burma on human rights, and he expressed his hope that Japanese photojournalist Kenji Nagai's death would encourage the Japanese Government to change its stance. Oshima criticized MOFA's policy of not pressuring Burma too much to avoid pushing it closer to China, and he had been in touch with "senior MOFA officials" to press this point and argue for a firmer stance. The reality is that China has already invested heavily in Burma and has plenty of influence there. Oshima offered his assurance that "Japan would stand with the United States and European countries on this issue."

4. (C) In a separate conversation, Chuo University Law School Professor Yozo Yokota, former UN Rapporteur on Burma, told Embassy Tokyo that the intense media coverage of Nagai's death, combined with pressure from local non-government organizations, foreign governments and the Diet's Parliamentary League to Promote the Democratization of Burma, are forcing the government to "finally take a firm stance."

As a result, the Japanese government has no choice but to review its Burma policies, including scaling back ODA "in some form." MOFA's engagement with Burma over ten years has produced no constructive outcome,8 Yokota argued. In general, opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) members are more active and vocal on the Burma issue than the ruling LDP's members, said Yokota, adding that the DPJ's power and presence increased after the July 2007 Upper House election, and so has its influence over the ministries.

15. (C) Yokota noted that cooperation with China is essential in getting the Burmese military junta to change. China is facing a dilemma, however, because of its new position in the international community, as well as its strategic interests. While it would like to be in step with the rest of the world on Burma, it cannot afford to isolate it. In the main, Yokota's perception is that China would prefer a transfer to civil government rather than "revolutionary change" led by someone like Aung Sang Suu Kyi.

16. (C) Yokota said that core members of the Burma Democratization Parliamentary League include Oshima, Yukio Hatoyama (Democratic Party of Japan - DPJ), Tsuneo Suzuki (LDP), Takashi Kosugi (LDP), Toshiko Hamayotsu (Komeito), Mizuho Fukushima (Social Democratic Party), Yoshinori Suematsu (DPJ) Satsuki Eda (DPJ) and Tomiko Okazaki (DPJ). The league's purpose is to take a firm stance on Burma's human rights violations and to demand the release of Aung Sang Suu Kyi.

...But Not Everyone Is Convinced

17. (C) Toru Terai, Deputy Director of the NGO Japan-Myanmar Association, argued to Embassy Tokyo that outside pressure on

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Burma was the "last thing" the Burmese people wanted or needed. Instead of isolating Burma, the international community should focus on fostering economic growth and stabilizing Burma's currency. "Only by doing so will the Burmese find their own way to democracy," Terada asserted.

Japan Feels Loss of Khin Nyunt

18. (C) LDP Diet member Kato Koichi told Embassy Tokyo that he was extremely close to ousted Burmese Prime Minister Khin Nyunt and hosted a dinner for him during Khin's visit to Japan in 2000 to attend former Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi's funeral. At the time, Kato advised Khin to transform Burma's poppy fields into buckwheat fields. Kato later visited Burma to view the fields and was joined by Khin and seven other Burmese ministers. Kato opined that Khin had gone too far in transforming Burma, provoking Senior General Than Shwe's wrath. Kato hoped that one day Khin would return to power, but he added that nothing but pressure from China would sway Than, something Kato worried China might be unwilling to do. MOFA has no channel to Burma now that Khin is gone, he said.

19. (C) Prof. Yokota confirmed that the arrest of Khin in 2004 ended Japan's best connection to Burma's rulers but said Japan has other channels. Yokota claimed that there are former Japanese soldiers who are able to meet with Than, but that they never broach political topics with Burmese military leaders, making them an ineffective tool for the Japanese government.

Special Relationship Between Japan and Burma

110. (C) Yokota and Kato emphasized the special relationship between Japan and Burma that began in the last phase of the Pacific War. The Japanese army used Burma in its attack on British forces in India, according to Yokota, although the Burmese thought Japan had come to liberate them from the

British. When the Japanese lost the Battle of Imphal in India in 1944, many Japanese escaped to Burma and were looked after by Burmese farmers, Yokota explained. Ultimately, the Japanese-trained Burmese army ended up fighting the Japanese at the end of the war, but, nevertheless, the Japanese feel they owe a debt of gratitude to the Burmese and have willingly provided the country with aid.

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